

# **REFLECTIONS ON HISTORY, NATION-BUILDING AND THE UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**BY**

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UNTIL now no professor in our forty three-year old History Department has dared to deliver an inaugural lecture. The first ever such lecture from the sister department at Ibadan was given by Professor Tekena N. Tamuno in October 1973, that is, a quarter of a century after the establishment of the department.' For these reasons, I tremble and suspect that I am rushing where angels fear to tread. My only excuse for this misguided boldness is simply that it takes a professor to give an inaugural lecture. Coincidentally, a foundation student of the Department stands before you this moment to blaze the trail.

As there are no predecessors on whom it is customary to shower praises, I seize the opportunity to acknowledge my enormous indebtedness to several eminent teachers at home and abroad. I would like to mention in particular the late East German universal historian Professor Walter Markov and the no less distinguished Cambridge trained scholar Professor J. E. Flint. Both academics came to Nsukka on secondment from Karl Marx University, Leipzig and King's College, London respectively. With the assistance of Dr. J. C. Munford, an African-American, and our own Dr. (afterwards professor) Modilim Achufusi, Markov and Flint placed the Department on a firm footing. The foundation was thought sound enough to warrant the admission of two pioneer graduates of the Department to the doctoral programme of Churchill College, Cambridge and King's College, London without being subjected to remedial courses. This was a remarkable achievement in view of the doubts being expressed at that time in some circles about the quality of teaching at Nsukka. At King's College, London I had the privilege of close interaction with the late well-known imperial historian Professor Gerald Graham. I also derived immense benefit from discussions with Mr. George Bennett of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Oxford as well as Professor George Shepperson of the University of Edinburgh. The former suggested the topic of my doctoral thesis while the latter drew my attention to several relevant sources.

This inaugural lecture is fourteen years overdue for reasons, which need not delay us. So in a sense I am not quite a new professor. All the same an inaugural affords a professor whether old or fresh a chance to speak *ex cathedra*, to say practically anything he likes without being questioned or challenged. I am of the opinion that the occasion calls for an address on aspects of my discipline that are of academic and public interest. After all, a professor operates in society, not in a vacuum. If his inaugural address is to be useful and relevant it should contain, among other things, something of interest not only to the narrow tribe of specialists but also to the layman and the government whose financial support sustains the work of the university. This is why I have chosen the topic "Reflections on History, Nation-Building and the University of Nigeria."

The discourse will be in three sections. The first part will contain my thoughts on the status of the historical discipline in Nigeria. It will examine the nature, methods and value of history as an academic endeavour. In the second part I shall try to show the contribution historical education can make to national development. Of course some people would expect the first inaugural lecture from a department of history to offer the audience a glimpse of the past of the home university. For this reason the third and concluding segment will cast a glance at some major developments in this great centre of higher learning since its inception. The choice of events was influenced by time constraint and the need to put the record straight. Indeed one of the tasks of a historian, as we shall shortly show, is to present an account that is as close as possible to what actually took place. Not only do official compilations gloss over embarrassing episodes, they also tend to embellish and justify the policies of the authorities.

At this point we arrive at the first section of the lecture namely: the local perception, nature, methods and use of history. The generality of our compatriots believe that the study of history is a trivial pursuit, an expensive pastime which nations in embryo like Nigeria cannot afford to indulge in. So strong is the prejudice against the subject that many parents dissuade their children from reading it on the additional ground that it possesses few employment prospects. Even many an academic colleague who should know better is amazed that some of us are studying history. When we are not told in the words of Tolstoy "what an excellent thing history would be if only it were true", we are reminded that history is something that never happened, written by a man who was not there. When we are not rebuked for not letting bygones be bygones, we are persuaded to leave the dead past to bury its dead and face instead the present and the future over which we can exercise some influence however modest. What is fictitious, say some critics, may well be worthless. Even if a reconstruction of past happenings is possible, they further argue, there is no connection between such events on the one hand and the present and future possibilities on the other. Not surprisingly no

historian accompanied the team that presented Nigeria's current claim to ownership of the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula before the International Court of Justice.

Nigerian historians bear a considerable measure of the blame for the depressing image of their discipline in the country. We often fail to contribute historical knowledge to public debates in the press on issues of national and international importance. How many of us, for example, have written informed articles for newspapers on the current dispute between Nigeria and the Cameroons over Bakassi? Would our compatriots not obtain a deeper appreciation of the judgement of the International Court of Justice on the matter from a comment penned in the context of the scramble for and partition of Africa by the European states in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Does our silence during such heated controversies not amount to a confirmation of the popular view that historical education is a sheer waste of time and of hard-earned money that could be put to better use? Nevertheless those who hold such opinions publicise their ignorance of the nature of the subject. And any person who misunderstands what history is all about is also likely to miss its true value in human affairs.

So what is history? The expression "history" comes from the Greek "*hisfona*" meaning what we know as a result of enquiry. In theory history concerns itself with the verifiable actions, fortunes and misfortunes of human beings. *On* this view one would expect historical studies to devote most space to the masses - the ordinary men, women and children - who have always formed the bulk of the population of every society. But in practice historians tend to take their bearing almost exclusively from the political endeavours of prominent personalities and nation-states. Occasionally some intellectuals deviate from the norm. Voltaire, Gibbon, Hume and Bolingbroke wrote history in terms of ideas. Ibn Khaldun demonstrated the importance of sociology to history. While Montesquieu showed the influence of geography and the environment, Marx emphasised economic factors and class struggle. In the twentieth century French scholars of the *Annales* school sought to replace political history with a wider and more human history, an account that encompasses all aspects of human activity.

In all these historical accounts whether based on the traditional or unorthodox perspective, transient earthly ambitions and the well-being of the material earthly body dominate the scene. Their pursuit is made an end instead of a means to the attainment of human aspirations of a higher nature. When higher values are noticed at all, they merely receive a perfunctory bow. Yet like his earthly needs, man's subtle yearnings of a cultural and spiritual kind also deserve equal notice. After all, man consists not just of the outer material physical body but also of soul or better still spirit. Actually the real human being is the inner spiritual core. When I speak of my body am I not saying that the physical body is not I? I am the inner spiritual core, the real self, whose garment, cloak or covering is the

outer material body. The inner man owns the body and makes it tick by supplying warmth and movement. When the actual human being withdraws from a body which has been forcibly destroyed, ruined by disease or weakened by old age, what is called death occurs. The physical body becomes lifeless, cold and motionless due to the absence of the owner, the spirit. What then is "soul"? Soul is the spirit without the physical cloak. Hence we speak of the departed soul. The departed soul also has a human form.

It is important to note that spirit is not intellect. Intellect is produced from thoughts generated by the frontal brain. Like the brain, which gives rise to it, intellect is material not spiritual. Also like the earthly garment it is an instrument whose purpose is to aid spiritual advancement. At physical death body and intellect cease to function as experience abundantly demonstrates. Having dropped its material covering, the departed soul enters another world, another realm, the beyond. There the departed soul continues to exist and mature. Unlike matter, which is transient and perishable, spirit is eternal. Time-constraint does not permit one to pursue the matter further. But from what has been said so far about the nature of man, it seems clear that ideally history should tell the story of his spiritual experience since his appearance in the world of matter.

But nowadays the word "history" is often used in the sense of tracing the sequence of events of material interest. Thus a history of science would among other things show what questions man has asked at various times about the visible world and what answers he has found satisfactory. The ancient Greeks wanted to know the substance of which the universe was made. Some mediaeval thinkers wondered whether it was helpful studying cause and effect or whether everything was simply to be explained as being the Will of the Creator. In the seventeenth century men asked if the universe could not be explained in mathematical terms.

Another usage of the expression "history" is in the sense of an academic subject, that is, a type of intellectual pursuit. This is the sense in which it is understood when a prospective undergraduate proudly declares: "I am going to Nsukka to read history" or when we are informed that J. F. Ade Ajayi, Tekena Tamuno and Obaro Ikime obtained a doctorate in history before Elizabeth Isichei, J. U. J. Asiegbu and Yusufu Bala Usman.

Admittedly, history is by no means the only course of study that deals with human beings. Social science disciplines such as anthropology, economics, geography, political science, psychology and sociology also concern themselves with man. But in contrast to historians, social scientists tend to investigate the contemporary social phenomena. They also strive to discover patterns in social

phenomena. On the basis of such regularities, they make predictions and forecasts. While history is past-oriented, the social sciences are present and future-oriented.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Professor John B. Bury of Cambridge claimed that "history is science, no less, no more". Is that right? Not quite. Science can mean three things:

- a) it can mean knowledge;
- b) it can mean knowledge of nature and
- c) it can mean the scientific method.

On this basis the question: "is history science?" can also mean three things. It can mean: is history a branch of knowledge, a field of enquiry? In this sense history is a science. It is also in this sense that theology was once admired as "queen of the sciences".

The question can mean: is history knowledge of nature; does it deal with material phenomena like rocks, atoms, chemicals, climate, water, air and fire? In this sense history is not science.

The question: is history science? can also mean does history use the scientific method? In this sense history is also science.

The historian and the scientist begin by defining the problem. For the scientist the problem may be the cause of AIDS. For the historian the problem may be the causes of the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The scientist collects his evidence from observation, measurement and experiments in the laboratory. The historian gathers his data from documentary sources, oral traditions and artifacts in archives and museums. The scientist makes deductions from his observations, measurements and experiments. His finding could be that a mango seed always produces a multiple of mango fruits, not corn or paw paw; as the seed so the harvest.

The historian offers explanations, which throw light on the problem. He

might identify rural poverty, oppressive taxation and an arrogant bureaucracy as the remote causes of the revolt in question. He might trace the immediate cause to an incompetent and morally bankrupt leadership. But unlike the scientist whose experiment is recorded in a cut and nail fashion, the historian is expected to present the outcome of his research to the public in an elegant narrative. And composition is an art. There is much truth in Oscar Wilde's remark: "Any fool can make history. It takes a genius to write it." Surely not every intellectual is a match for such masters of prose as Onwuka Dike, Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust, Livy, Tacitus, Gibbon, Macaulay, Arnold J. Toynbee and Eric Williams, the author of the classic Capitalism and Slavery. It is not for nothing that history is sometimes described as a branch of literature. History is both art and science. It is scientific in its method but artistic in its presentation.

An early good example of the point just made is Thucydides' account of the epic struggle between Athens and Sparta penned nearly four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Thucydides himself was an Athenian and he fought in the war about which he writes with an admirable blend *of* detachment and human compassion. Explaining his method and purpose in writing The Peloponnesian War Thucydides draws attention to the enormous pains he took in assembling, checking and analysing his evidence. He is convinced that human experience tends to repeat itself; that future leaders would encounter the same kind of problems that menaced their predecessors and that consequently it is only by finding out accurately what happened in the past that statesmen may equip themselves to solve problems of the moment. Hence his boast: 'My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever'; a claim which so far has been borne out by the unabated popularity of the book over the ages.

Despite the assurance of credibility offered by the critical manner in which Thucydides collected and used his sources reinforced by his even-handed commentary on developments - in spite of all this critics, continue to wonder whether history can indeed be objective. They argue that what for example historians once wrote about ancient Africa, pre-Columbian America and colonial India is not what they now say. Are the conflicting explanations of the same historical events advanced by different historians equally arbitrary or equally objective? The answer is not as simple as the question itself. It depends on how one understands 'arbitrary' and 'objective' in the context. In the sense that the interpretations are invariably based on a fraction of the evidence, a part of the whole, they may be said to be equally arbitrary. But in so far as the arguments follow where the available material leads they are equally valid. Sometimes the seemingly divergent conclusions are due to the different angles from which various historians approached the same episode. The situation maybe compared to photographs of the front, back and side views of the same building. Because no one particular section of the building can present the total picture, the overall impressions given by the front, back and side elevations are bound to differ. Yet each snapshot is valid and objective as far as the shape and details of the corresponding elevation are concerned.

This is why objective history as understood by the otherwise eminent German historian Leopold von Ranke and his disciples does not exist. Conventional history as it really happened is not possible for no scholar however gifted can reproduce the countless details of even a single episode, that is, every thing that men, women and children did, said, thought and suffered with regard to the happening in question. Far from embracing man's entire past, conventional

historical study concerns itself with only that small section of the past for which information exists. For the contemporary period the surviving mass of data is so vast that it is utterly impossible to squeeze all the available material on any event into a single volume. The investigator is obliged to select his facts; thereafter he verifies and interprets them by showing among other things when, how and why one development led to another.. When we are writing the history of a people, we are explaining the changes that occurred during a given time frame. The facts a given researcher chooses for analysis often depend on his private beliefs, the age and circumstances in which he lives. Thus his bias could be national, ideological, religious, ethnic or racial. To fill major gaps in documentary evidence and oral traditions, he turns to archaeology, linguistics and numismatics for clues. Where all else fails, he resorts to plausible guesses. As obscure comers are illuminated by further research previous explanations including plausible guesses are re-examined and where necessary modified or even abandoned so as to get nearer the truth.

Like historical interpretations scientific explanations also undergo revision from time to time. In antiquity Anaxagoras, a contemporary of Thucydides, maintained that matter is infinitely divisible and that there is no such thing as the smallest possible particle. Democritus held a contrary view arguing that all matter consists of indivisible pieces, atoms, which are s<sup>^</sup> small that they cannot be seen. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century Copernicus overthrew Ptolemy's system, which for nearly one thousand five hundred years presented the earth as the centre of the universe. The shortcomings of the concepts of matter, space and time held from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries were in turn exposed early in the twentieth century. The experiments of J. J. Thompson and Lord Rutherford revealed that chemical atoms are not the final constituents of matter as



had been supposed. Sub-atomic, that is, smaller particles such as electron, proton, neutron and positron appeared. Nor is the atom a solid hard particle like a billiard ball. More surprising, the attempt to predict the behaviour of subatomic particles by Newtonian mechanics failed.

A new quantum mechanics had to be applied, which suggested that such particles were not definite things, in definite places, having definite velocities. The mere act of observation affected their behaviour. It was impossible to know both the position and the velocity of an electron exactly, because measuring the one was liable to change the other.<sup>2</sup>

It was also discovered that although electrons often behaved like particles, they sometimes behaved like groups of waves. Above all, it was also found that mass could be annihilated, with the appearance of an equivalent in radiation<sup>3</sup>. These totally unexpected developments suggested that ultimate particles do not seem to possess such properties as permanence, unique position and amenability to Newtonian Law which had previously been regarded as characteristics of all matter.

At the same time Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (1905) showed that contrary to Newton's claims in the seventeenth century time and space are not absolute or independent concepts. They must always stand in relation to something, which is in space for example the universe. We experience the difference in time also in dreams when developments needing decades to materialise unroll before our inner eyes in seconds or minutes. In his General Theory of Relativity advanced in 1916 Einstein further explains that everything in the universe is interdependent; there is nothing absolute in it, everything has a relation, that is a connection with everything else. Except for matters of atomic smallness or cosmic magnitude Newtonian science remains adequate for many purposes especially those of ordinary engineering. Despite its indisputable

accomplishments, science is at last becoming fully aware of its own inadequacies. Scientists now talk of probabilities and tendencies rather than laws.

It follows from the foregoing analysis that neither science nor conventional history is synonymous with Truth which never changes.

The fact that historical accounts do not contain the whole truth does not necessarily render historical studies useless. After all, our eyes and ears are not always trustworthy. When things are too small, like bacteria, or very far away, like celestial bodies, we cannot see them at all unless with an aid. And when they are too large we cannot see them completely. When we dip a long stick in a clear pool of water it looks bent. But we do not consider our eyes useless because they do not always reflect the correct picture. Similarly our ears can pick only a very limited range of tones. They cannot pick fine sound in a room. To pick such sound we need sensitive instruments like radio and television. But no normal human being would therefore consider his ears and eyes useless or refuse to care for them simply because they are not always reliable.

The same applies to history. Despite its defects it still has some use for man. Nothing can be explained in human affairs without reference to the past. A group of people cannot talk for long without referring to the past. It is the only means whereby we may understand the present. Hence it has been described as the collective memory of mankind. A man who loses memory of what went before will be a man adrift. He would not know where he came from and where he intended to go or what he wanted to do. The same is true of society. History is to society what remembered experience is to the individual. Like individuals communities strive to learn from their mistakes and derive encouragement from their triumphs.

It is true that no age is exactly like another, that moral standards have varied

from epoch to epoch and that historical events are unique. The historian deals with the particular not the general. He is concerned with for example this empire, this economic depression, this king, this civil war and not with empires, economic recessions, kings, and civil wars in general. Each civil war was fought only once and is not exactly like any other social upheaval. Despite its apparent uniqueness each civil war nevertheless contains something of wider application, which enables historians to classify and generalise. Thus under the pressure of socio-economic distress and uncontrolled violence, moral values broke down during the Peloponnesian War, the French Revolution and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq this year. The same breakdown of law and order has marked the political upheavals in Yugoslavia, Angola, Liberia, Rwanda and the Congo Democratic Republic. The general in our chosen example is the total or near total collapse of morality and security although the specific details in each case are as different as light is from darkness. It is the general in the particular and the portrayal of how things came to be what they are at the material moment that give historical studies their value for society.

Thus a government with a sense of history will not ignore persistent demands for far-reaching reforms that are manifestly overdue as the Bourbon Kings did in eighteenth century France thereby unleashing the French Revolution. A regime with a sense of history will not merely offer token concessions that hardly address fundamental issues at stake as the Romanov Dynasty did in twentieth century Russia thereby provoking the Bolshevik Revolution.

The well-known aphorism that the lesson history teaches is that history teaches no lessons does not mean that the discipline offers no lessons. On the contrary historical lessons abound. The problem is that while exercising our

freewill, the ability to choose and decide, we seem to be afflicted by a myopia that prevents us from seeing and learning from the failures and achievements of our predecessors. Three concrete illustrations will suffice. The people of England revolted against the Stuart absolutist monarchs in the seventeenth century because of arbitrary taxation. The following century King George III of the succeeding dynasty, the Hanoverian Dynasty, provoked the American colonies into rebellion against the mother country again due to arbitrary taxation. The immediate cause of the French Revolution of 1789 barely a decade and a half later was the refusal of the nobles and the clergy to bear their share of the financial burden. Does this not show that human experience tends to repeat itself? Have racism, class struggle, imperialism, dictatorship, diplomatic relations, terrorism, reform, religious intolerance, war, patriotism, peace and nation-building - have these also not been recurrent episodes of history? Is it unwise to probe the past to discover how our predecessors handled such problems and with what success?

The mention of nation-building just now as one of the recurrent themes of history naturally leads us to the second segment of this inaugural address, that is, the contribution historical education can make to the process of national development. Unfortunately our policy makers still find it extremely difficult to appreciate what development involves. Thus although our Second National Development Plan 1970 - 1974 declared the building of "a united, strong and self-reliant nation" as one of the five main objectives of the Federal Government, the authorities do not consider history important enough to be taught as a compulsory subject at either the primary or secondary schools or both. And yet history is unquestionably the most potent academic discipline for the inculcation of patriotism and national pride. In addition to establishing seven universities of

technology between 1980 and 1982, the Government has directed that in conventional universities sixty percent of undergraduate admission must be to courses in the sciences. Humanistic disciplines and the social sciences are to share the remaining forty per cent of the places.

To see advancement solely in terms of mega projects, high profile stadia, high-tech industries, five-star-hotels, new capitals, presidential palaces, the variety of imported foods and gadgets and of course the Gross National Product is to miss the point. The point is that material values are neither the only values nor even the most important. As already noted there are values of a nobler and higher nature which stand in even greater need of nourishment. It is these subtle yearnings of the actual human being that the humanities seek to satisfy. These yearnings have no absolute connection with sophisticated technology. Thus a community that is technologically backward may possess a richer inner life than a highly industrialised society. Once we realise that the state is a device for the attainment of man's earthly and spiritual aspirations we have the right yardstick for assessing the success or failure of a nation.

Nigeria as a British occupied territory was not only conceived in violence, it was also sustained by the free use of it. Having awarded themselves vast tracts of the natives' lands, the foreign intruders proceeded to rearrange matters to suit their own world view which in the main was and still is atheistic, materialistic and above all excessively individualistic and legalistic. Surely it would be naive to expect adventurers in search of material wealth to love strangers of another race more than themselves. Cecil Rhodes, the great British Empire builder, let the cat out of the bag when he confessed that "pure philanthropy is very well in its way, but philanthropy plus five per cent is a good deal better". He might have said

seventy-five per cent! And he employed the "philanthropy plus" method not only to feather his own nest but also in transactions with those who were necessary tools in the realisation of his dream of empire.

As rulers of the country the British invaders maintained that democracy was bad for the natives. Only when the white oppressors found themselves in retreat and realised that we were bent on ending foreign domination did they belatedly offer us their own political system to mimic. At that time only a handful of the native potential voters and candidates were literate enough to understand the electoral regulations.

In the end the multi-party system bequeathed by Britain neither produced stability nor a painless change of leadership. The result was that the first five years of independence were marked by a series of violent crises which culminated in a military take-over. Among the crises were the Tiv Riots (1960 -66), the Western Nigeria Emergency (1962), the National Census Controversy (1962 - 1963), the Federal Election Crisis (1964 -65) and the Western Nigeria Election Crisis (1965 - 1966). Between 1966 and 1990 Nigeria experienced no less than six military coups relieved by a brief return to the two-party system that made mockery of liberal democracy. According to the authoritative weekly magazine Tell, on April 28 1997 alone the military despot General Sanni Abacha siphoned sixty million dollars and thirty million pounds sterling from the national treasury<sup>4</sup>. After his death investigators in Nigeria, Europe and America discovered 130 bank accounts at home and abroad where he kept his loot estimated at several billion dollars.

Our experiments with the parliamentary democracy, military rule and now the American presidential model have failed largely because we have allowed admiration of our white conquerors to degenerate into blind imitation. It is just

through difference in kind that right harmony comes into existence not through uniformity among all the peoples. Otherwise there would have been only one people and one country. The flowers in the meadows enchant and refresh on account of their variety. True progress for each people lies solely in the cultivation of its own culture adapted to the environment and race. Progress shows itself in the improvement of what already exists as distinct from slavish copying. When the ancient Romans began to imitate the vices and luxuries of the conquered population, they unwittingly sowed the seed of decline and eventual disintegration of their empire.

The ancient Greeks drew a lot of inspiration from the arts and science of the Egyptians just as mediaeval Europeans also learnt a great deal from the Chinese of their own day. But the ancient Greeks and the mediaeval Europeans did not slavishly imitate everything they found in Egypt and China. They neither adopted the Egyptian language, food and form of government nor the dress, names and marriage customs of the Chinese. They were content to adapt the scientific achievements they needed and nothing more. In modern times the Japanese have copied western technology without abandoning their indigenous culture. Similarly the Bolsheviks did not slavishly follow the doctrines of the master Karl Marx. And when the Chinese people made their own revolution in 1949 they too did not faithfully follow the footprints left by their Soviet comrades. Nor did the Cubans seek to establish in their own country carbon copy of Chinese communism. While the principle - the organic theory of the state - behind the communist regimes in the defunct Soviet Union, China and Cuba is more or less the same, the form which communism assumed in these territories is not. What is true of communism is also true of western parliamentary democracy. The British model is not exactly the

same in structure as the American and the French. The Europeans, Chinese, Cubans, Japanese and Russians did not transplant foreign usages and ideologies because they recognised that they would not thrive in their own economic and socio-political environment.

Any meaningful effort to address the problems of nation-building in Nigeria must be done in the context of our own past in particular and the universal experience of humanity in general. Self-government gave our leaders the opportunity to return to the mainstream of our traditional life and culture by adapting or abandoning disruptive foreign ideas and practices introduced by European imperial agencies. The chance has not been put to any meaningful use partly due to neo-colonialist pressures and partly because the authorities themselves seem quite content with aping the life-style of the former white oppressor. Western civilisation resembles an oak tree that looks healthy but whose interior has already been eaten away by rot. The spectacular scientific advancement of Europe since the eighteenth century reinforced by the glittering splendour of western cities as well as the parochialism and cultural arrogance of many western writers - all this has the combined effect of concealing from the superficial observer the fact that western society has entered an advanced stage of decay.

Therefore in discussing the appropriate political structure for contemporary Nigeria asking whether it conforms to any particular western or other foreign model will serve no useful purpose. One should rather ask whether it is in consonance with our culture, historical experience and belief in an absolute moral order. But how many of our countrymen and women in private employment, public service, politics and business - how many of them have a nodding acquaintance with the history of the nation-state they are serving or aspire to serve?



What maybe called the traditional African political system south of the Sahara is essentially democratic. Leaders were aware that authority was not concentrated in them but shared out to structures, which they merely coordinated. It was their duty to defend the principles of discussion, disagreement and dispersion of power. Under the system every section of the population participated in the decision -making process. After debates a consensus was reached. The absence of legalised opposition parties does not detract from the merit of the system. Opposition is bposition; whether it comes from within or without, from below or above is beside the point.

Rulers and leaders emerged not through a process of election on the basis of one man one vote. Only mature, industrious and experienced men of integrity, albeit illiterate, usually reached the top. Western-style democracy with its literacy qualifications and huge electoral expenses has had the effect of preventing such men from being nominated for parliamentary seats their honesty, experience and wisdom notwithstanding.

No one was denied access to land, water and forest. Practically every normal person was a worker so that idling, robbery, prostitution and loitering were considered extremely disgraceful. Safeguards for redress also formed an integral part of the system. The individual had the right to be heard, the right to appeal against judgment and even the right to oracular adjudication.

At the heart of African cosmology is the concept of an absolute moral order sustaining Creation<sup>5</sup>. This order may not be upset or disregarded with impunity. This philosophy of life especially south of the Sahara may not have led to the production of a sophisticated technology but in general it provided relatively peaceful, contented and stable societies which over the millennia evolved the

institutions of state in places. The Baganda of East Africa, and the Asante, Edo and Yoruba in West Africa established states in response to their religious, political and economic needs as perceived by them. In the savannah region of the Congo, south of the equatorial forest, there also emerged powerful kingdoms and empires whose origins go back to the fifteenth century if not earlier. Of these, the Luba and Kazembe kingdoms and the Kongo and Lunda empires stand out. Little or nothing was known about their history and structure until Jan Vansina's Kingdoms of the Savannah appeared in 1966. Basing themselves on European standards which they assumed to be the norm, some white adventurers declared African traditional arrangements that did not resemble what they were used to barbarous and static. Actually no human society however conservative is static for motion is a Law of Creation. That pre-colonial Black African communities were no exception to this natural law is borne out by the numerous references in their oral traditions to migrations, conquests and social unrest all of which imply change.

If we earnestly desire a rapid technological advancement in Nigeria we must examine the history of our technological growth and build from there. Most if not all of our planners seem either utterly ignorant or uninterested in such a history. They appear eager to destroy whatever exists in the mistaken belief that it is primitive. They hope that after their work of destruction they can import modern technology as if technology is a type of seed that drops from the sky, germinates and grows without making the slightest contact with the soil. Whether such advanced technology is workable or appropriate for the country does not bother the planners. What interests them is the level of technological sophistication.

If pre-colonial African manufactured goods are not appreciated by many an economic adviser, it is probably due to the fact that the phrase "manufactured

goods" evokes a picture of gigantic machines, imposing factories and vast quantities of merchandise for sale. Otherwise, the word "manufacture" literally means made by hand. Through north Africa, European traders got to know about some of these local manufactures. One of the articles is the superior brand of red leather which they described as "Moroccan leather" although it was tanned and dyed by Hausa and Mandingo specialists in northern Nigeria and Mali. Late fifteenth century Portuguese visitors to the kingdom of Kongo, probably founded in the previous century, openly admired the velvet-like cloths they saw on display. The textile materials were made from bark and palm fibre. A publication by Dr. Edmund O. Egbah, a retired colleague in the History Department, shows that during the early colonial period the products of the local cloth industry in northern Nigeria were superior to, and hence in greater demand than, those of Lancashire textile industry in Britain despite the latter's advantage of a relatively superior technology and the enthusiastic support offered it by the imperial power<sup>6</sup>. There is no need to multiply similar instances. What may be inferred from the few just cited is that it was only at the level of scale that African manufactures lagged behind their foreign counterparts. Where for hundreds of years that supposedly archaic traditional technology met the basic material needs of the peoples of this country, our modern western-trained technologists have so far failed to equal much less surpass the achievements of their so-called backward predecessors.

Of course no one is here advocating an uncritical return to the way things were done one or two thousand years ago in what is now Nigeria. On the contrary what is being urged is that our policy makers can also benefit immensely from the local historical antecedents of whatever measures they are contemplating. Professor Onwuka Dike was making the same point fifty years ago when in his

now famous article "African History and Self-Government" he declared that for young and emergent nations there is no study as important as that of history<sup>7</sup>. "True development", he went on, "can only take place on a basis of profound self-knowledge. So long as the African is regarded as a man without a culture and without a history, doubts concerning his ability to govern himself will find credence"<sup>8</sup>

Nation-building is a many-sided process. It involves economic development and the establishment of new institutions to meet local challenges and those of the wider world. It concerns national integration, the welding together of various ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural groupings. During the partition of Africa the colonising Europeans invariably disregarded ethnic and cultural boundaries. As a consequence most newly independent African territories are fabrications concocted by the former European colonial powers and released into an international system fashioned by the same European states in the light of European history and European political philosophy. The political entity created by the British and styled Nigeria was one vast piece of complexity. No one segment, at least on the surface, seemed to have anything in common with the other. The climate, the terrain, the peoples and their cultures, social and political organisation -all these varied from zone to zone. At the time of the amalgamation of 1914 by the British the number of the various ethnic communities stood at 250.

Because the amalgamation of 1914 was an artificial union, peace has eluded the country right from the eve of self-government. Once the imperial power had committed itself unequivocally to a speedy withdrawal, a sordid struggle for succession between the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba leaders overshadowed attacks upon the alien intruder. It was a struggle in which politicians and journalists were

deeply involved. Eventually rivalry between the major ethnic blocs in the southern region of the country was partially submerged by the more dreadful clash of southern interests with those of the emergent North.

The lesson that flows from the dissolution of the various empires in ancient and modern times as well as the recent disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and the prolonged tension in Sudan, Rwanda and Canada is that forced associations must break-up at the end of the day. Yet in Nigeria after forty-three years of turbulent politics and mutual suspicion marked by a bloody civil war, the vehement agitation for a national conference to discuss the conditions on which the artificial amalgamation may continue is being resisted. The issue of the right political arrangement is of paramount importance. Until it is settled the fate of the nation will continue to hang in the balance and the populace will never be mobilised for social and economic reconstruction.

It is the recognition of the role historical studies can play in the awakening and sustenance of national awareness and pride that drove several nineteenth and early twentieth century West African patriots to dream of an African institution of higher learning run by men of African blood. Of the dreamers - and we are now entering the third and concluding section of the inaugural lecture "History of the University" - of the dreamers and visionaries the best known is Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. He was born and educated when nearly the entire African continent was languishing under colonial subjugation. As in the continent so outside it, Africans and persons of African descent were oppressed, considered inferior to the rest of humanity and insulted with impunity. Perceptive black patriots saw that Africans at home and in the diaspora faced a common problem requiring a common solution that would bring mutual benefit. One of these patriots though by no means the

earliest was Azikiwe. For the greater part of his public life he grappled with the Black man's predicament. In the process he became a pan-African nationalist, politician, journalist, statesman and educationist.

As a student and teacher in several American tertiary institutions during the 1920s and early 1930s, Azikiwe discovered that the great European universities were rooted in local soil. He also noted that many a western scholar was bent on demonstrating the supposed superiority of western civilisation and that foreign university courses were not designed to also project the culture, dignity and accomplishments of the Black man. An African exposed to western education tended to abandon the indigenous way of life. For this reason Azikiwe felt disenchanted with the University College, Ibadan (UCI) which the British colonial authorities set up in 1948 as an integral part of London University.

Those who planned Ibadan assumed that a curriculum appropriate for British youths brought up in London, Manchester and Birmingham would be equally suitable for Black young women and men nurtured in Lagos, Accra and Nairobi. Thus concern for academic excellence and European culture was allowed to overshadow the culture and aspirations of Nigerians whom UCI as an overseas campus of the University of London was meant to serve. Azikiwe yearned for a different sort of tertiary institution on African soil.

UCI's numerous shortcomings not only confirmed Azikiwe's fears but also attracted criticisms from various quarters. In the eight years between 1948 and 1956 the College produced only 210 graduates: 107 in the Arts, 91 in Science and 12 in Agriculture making an annual average of 26 graduates in a developing country with an estimated population of 30 million and an abundant supply of qualified material on the spot<sup>9</sup>. "The departments of botany and zoology entered

one candidate each and physics two candidates for the special degree examination in 1954 while chemistry had its first special graduate in 1955."<sup>o</sup> The Ashby Commission Report published in 1960 frowned at the small number of doctors being produced by the country's only medical school at UCI and recommended that the intake be doubled.

The narrow range of subjects offered at the place caused much greater concern. Humanistic disciplines notably Classics, English, European history and Religious Knowledge flourished at the expense of the applied sciences, vocational and other courses needed for rapid socio-economic advancement and national unification.

Another shortcoming was the high-cost of running the College. Undergraduates did not share hostel accommodation. Pairing students from different ethnic communities was not given a trial. This would have helped to promote national integration and reduce waste. Azikiwe had to complain at the National Assembly in Lagos that UCI was becoming a spoilt child, a million dollar baby. Each time it cries, it receives a kiss worth a million pounds. Having found out that it pays to cry, the baby has made crying its pastime.

What upset the pan-Africanist most was probably the fact that the system bred the type of creature the Yoruba call "Oyinbo dudu", that is, "black white man." The system produced snobbish graduates dark in complexion, very sound academically but mentally and culturally foreign. Of course the Achebes, Obiechinas and Ifemesias are among the handful of notable exceptions. While the British saw excellence in academic and architectural terms, Azikiwe insisted it also included relevance to the needs of the local society and racial pride.

In 1954 the Eastern Nigeria Government under the premiership of Azikiwe

began arrangements for the establishment of the University of Nigeria. Based at Nsukka with a staff strength of 24 and student enrolment of 220 its opening in October 1960 coincided with Nigeria's attainment of self-rule. The University logo portraying a black lion standing on its hind legs and motto "To Restore the Dignity of Man" proclaimed the new institution's determination to assert the relevance of the Black man. Professor George Johnson, an African-American Jurist and Civil Rights leader, Mr. Peter Wright, a Briton, and Mr. John Mangold, a Cambridge graduate, held the office of •vice-chancellor, registrar and bursar respectively. When the governing Council, headed by Azikiwe himself, discovered that Wright was a spy the registrar was dismissed with immediate effect.

Unlike UCI, Nsukka paired students in halls of residence, used the credit course system and also taught vocational subjects. In January 1961 the first vocational school, the College of Education, came into being. A new University of Nigeria Law promulgated later the same year provided for the establishment of a further thirty-five colleges among them business administration, journalism, secretarial studies, public administration, medicine and medical laboratory technology.

Its autonomous status enabled Nsukka Africanise its staff and syllabus to an appreciable extent right from the outset. The History Department for instance made African history the centre-piece of its programme and insisted that no student would pass with honours in History unless he took a prescribed number of themes in African history. The policy was a conscious rejection of the prevailing disdainful attitude to the study of African history. Did the distinguished Oxford historian Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper not tell the world in 1960 that there was no African history to teach, except that history which began with the coming of



Europeans to that continent? It was only after 1962, when Ibadan shook itself free from the constraints imposed by the London connection, that that institution began to offer African History as distinct from the activities of European explorers, traders, missionaries and empire-builders in Africa. Before then, English History, European History and the History of the British Empire dominated the syllabus.

At Nsukka the importance attached to African History was further demonstrated in 1963 when the History Department changed its name to the Department of History and Archaeology. Like other non-literate societies of Africa it is difficult to obtain documentary material for reconstructing the culture and history of many parts of Nigeria before the eighteenth century. And if the teaching of history in the university was to be related to the needs of the country, it had to seek ways and means of promoting the study and use of archaeology to supplement other sources. The contributions of Professor Donald D. Hartle and Dr. Fred N. Anozie to the establishment and development of the archaeology component of the Department deserve notice.

In 1962 the institution's primary school for staff children was launched. On June 15 the following year the university conferred degrees on 150 of its pioneer students: the first graduates of an autonomous tertiary institution in Nigeria and, with the possible exception of Liberia, in the whole of Africa south of the Sahara. The universities of London, Cambridge and the Sorbonne (Paris) admitted several of them to their doctoral programme in History, Sociology, Political Science and Literature. One gained admission to the M.Sc. programme of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Perhaps one should add that these academic ambassadors did not let down their *alma mater*.

At the home front the foundation graduates and their immediate successors

performed a similar feat. Quite a number of those awarded a pass degree were among the Nsukka products who topped the lists in the competitive examinations conducted by the Western, Mid-Western and Eastern Nigerian Public Services between September 1963 and 1966. The unexpected brilliant performance of Nsukka graduates for three consecutive years made a serious dent on Ibadan's academic prestige. The idea of B.A. and B.Sc. (Nsukka) instead of B.A. and B.Sc. (London) ceased to be a derogatory joke. The selection of Mr. Francis Ihenacho Okole, a 1966 mathematics graduate of Nsukka, as Rhodes scholar to Oxford provided further evidence of Nsukka's high academic standards and the fact that the new institution was already on its way to international acclaim.

Is it not an irony of history that the pioneer lions and lionesses and their immediate successors who came to the rescue of the *alma mater* when her fate hung in the balance are hardly mentioned by those who take it upon themselves to award laurels to distinguished alumnae and alumni? Thanks to the dazzling successes of the earliest lions and lionesses no one dared ridicule such subsequent ideas as B.Pharm (Uyo), LL.B. (Benin), B. Sc. (Port Harcourt), B.A. (Sokoto) and so on.

A bloody political upheaval leading to a breakdown of law and order throughout the nation forced highly qualified personnel of Eastern Nigeria origin in other sections of the country to seek refuge and employment in the Eastern Region. The arrival at Nsukka of such seasoned Ibadan scholars and administrators as Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo (a mathematician), Professor C. A. Onwumechili (physicist), Professor J. C. Anene (historian), Professor G. O. Onuaguluchi (pharmacologist), Professor A. N. Njoku-Obi (microbiologist), Professor Chukuedu Nwokolo (surgeon), Dr. (afterwards professor) Chieka C. Ifemesia

(historian), Professor A. N. A. Modebe (agricultural economist), and Mr. Mr. A. E. Oradubanya (administrator) significantly enhanced the quality of human resources of a tertiary institution already growing from strength to strength. Refugees from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria included experienced medical and secretarial staff, the librarians Mr. Celestine C Uwaechie and Mr. J. Anafulu as well as Dr. M. O. Chijioke, a professor of electrical engineering. Among other academic giants who fled to Nsukka was Professor Eni Njoku, a world-famed botanist and pioneer Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos. A celebrated economist Dr. Pius N. Okigbo described him as the "intellectuals' intellectual". Eni Njoku had the additional distinction of becoming in July 1966 the first Nigerian to head Nsukka. The presence of a large number of returnees - medical students, teachers and researchers - enabled him to establish the Faculty of Medicine in 1967. Professor Hubert Chukwuwetalu Kodilinye was appointed Dean.

The unwillingness of the Federal authorities to halt the molestation and massacre of Eastern Nigerians convinced the victims of their rejection by the rest of the population, in May 1967 the Eastern Region seceded from the Federation and adopted the name Biafra. With the outbreak of hostilities the University, now known as the University of Biafra, moved to Umuahia. So did its Teaching Hospital, which virtually appropriated the Queen Elizabeth Hospital there. When Kodilinye left Biafra, the Associate Dean of Medicine Professor G. Onuaguluchi assumed Deanship of the Faculty until the collapse of Biafra in January 1970. The University reverted to its original name but Eni Njoku, its chief executive, was elbowed aside by the power brokers mainly because of his conspicuous political activities on behalf of secessionist Biafra.

Kodilinye returned to become the first substantive post-war vice-chancellor.

Before the University engaged him on the eve of the civil war, he had lived in England for forty years. He trained and worked there as an ophthalmologist finally marrying an English lady. Some gossips whispered that he no longer remembered a word of his native Igbo language. Others added that he preferred "Kodlins," the anglicised version of his surname, and resented "nye."

As vice-chancellor Kodilinye proposed that the institution be restructured. He wanted to abandon the existing pattern fashioned by the Founding Fathers and replace it with the curriculum as well as the collegiate system of Oxford and Cambridge. The proposal amounted to a rejection of the General Studies programme, vocational subjects, the four-year degree course system, the credit course system and the prevailing physical and academic organisation. His intention was to build 8 to 10 colleges each with a provost as head. Every college would have its own facilities, administrative personnel, 45 academic staff and 300 to 400 undergraduates and post-graduates. Teaching would be by tutorials in small groups of four students. The university would in effect be a federation of colleges though admission of students and organisation of teaching would be handled centrally. Critics considered the model inappropriate, too elitist and too expensive for a developing poor African country like Nigeria whose historical and socio-economic background was in stark contrast to that of Great Britain, in addition to being extremely costly the proposed system would, by its very nature, limit student intake at a time when increased enrolment mattered most. Even the British themselves, excepting the monarchy, the aristocracy and the church were already turning away from the narrow theological, classical and mathematical preoccupations of eight hundred year-old Oxbridge. The newer universities, beginning with London and Durham, emerged to supply the needs of an expanding

industrial economy and the demands of a fast changing socio-political system that the two ancient universities were not responding to. By equating the University of Nigeria to the newer British tertiary institutions, critics made the ophthalmologist look unpatriotic and out of touch with the realities:

Meanwhile the Governing Council approved a Junior Fellowship Scheme under which the brightest graduating students would receive further training abroad. Then followed breath-taking medical feats by physicians at the Teaching Hospital. In 1972 Professor A. N. Njoku-Obi produced an anti-cholera vaccine at a time cholera was threatening the health of the populace. Two years later Professor F. A. Udekwu and his colleagues performed the first ever open-heart surgery in Nigeria and Black Africa. As might be expected the chief executive refurbished the Eye Ward.

The debate over the merits and demerits of the collegiate concept showed no signs of abating. It delayed the production of a master plan for the proposed model or even for the rebuilding of the war-damaged facilities.

Nor did the administration's preference of expatriates to local scholars with equivalent and quite often better credentials help matters". Kodilinye understood the purpose and the international character of a university simply in terms of racial mix. He saw nothing wrong with installing an outsider in policy-making positions. Critics of this policy argued that a centre of higher learning, whether in an industrialised or a developing country, was expected to serve national interests. Only staff with the vital interest of their country at heart would best safeguard those interests. People who disapproved of the chief executive's method were not objecting to the use of foreign teachers. They merely wanted the recruitment of such birds of passage to be on the basis of superior scholarship, not skin colour.

Having further alienated many members of the university community, the vice-chancellor was obliged to rely on a handful of loyalists. One of them scornfully dubbed an all-purpose errand boy served in no less than thirteen committees. Another, a theologian, represented the institution on the National Statistical Board<sup>2</sup>. Independent-minded dons were sidelined, victimised or frustrated out of the place regardless of their fields of specialisation.

Kodilinye's style of administration led to the emergence of a house-cleaning journal titled Nsukkascope. Its editorial committee boasted Chinua Achebe, a historical novelist of Things Fall Apart fame; Emmanuel Obiechina, a Cambridge-educated first-rate literary critic; Ikenna Nzimiro, another Cambridge-trained anthropologist cum sociologist and Chimere Ikoku who left the university in frustration and returned to head it. A noteworthy later recruit is Humphrey Assisi Asobie, an alumnus and political scientist who subsequently became a distinguished national president of the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU). Blistering attacks on the collegiate project by Nzimiro and Obiechina both of whom knew the grave defects of the model featured on the pages of Nsukkascope<sup>13</sup>. Exasperated the chief executive dismissed the entire Scope group as a bunch of rascals hinting that none of them would be promoted as long as he remained at the helm of affairs.

One of the consequences of the unending controversy over the collegiate pattern was that the first substantial capital grants of twenty-five million naira provided by the Federal Government remained unused for the purpose in view. When it dawned on the ophthalmologist that time was running out and that his pet proposal may never see the light of day he hurriedly began to erect temporary prefabricated structures. Drab, unrelated to any grand plan and now thoroughly

weather-beaten they stand in our midst as a mocking reminder of a lost opportunity.

After accusing Kodilinye of high-handedness and selective favouritism, the local branch of ASUU invited the Federal authorities to probe his administration. As if to lend support to their teachers' demand, the students burnt his effigy and likewise demanded his removal. The chief executive himself came to everybody's rescue by resigning his appointment in September 1974.

The mantle fell on Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo, a mathematician of international repute. His four-year tenure opened with further triumphs at the University's Medical College. In June 1975 the College presented our first set of medical students for the final and fifth professional examination. Two British external examiners were invited. Professor T. M. Chalmers of Cambridge served as external examiner in medicine while Professor B. Brooks from London University served as external examiner in surgery. Of the 50 candidates presented 49 passed. Three of them including Miss Philis C. Mbakirem obtained distinction in surgery. She also obtained the only . distinction in obstetrics and gynaecology.

Kodilinye left no hand-over notes. Nobody or office knew what to make of the sketches and drawings concerning the collegiate proposal. To save future chief executives from such embarrassment Ezeilo set up a Planning Unit.

Meanwhile the man of figures tried to rework the sketches permitting himself the liberty to insert what is now known as the Abuja Complex finished in 1982. The building derived its name from its prestigious fayade. The complex houses the Departments of Computer Science, Mathematics and Statistics in addition to the Physics and Chemistry Laboratories. Fortunately the National Universities Commission, in the process of reviewing the master plans of the older

Nigerian universities, asked for a more comprehensive blueprint; it was still On the drawing board when Ezeilo left office. How to run the place with dwindling financial resources and at the same time maintain high academic standards and peace on campus proved a harder nut to crack. By then the magic formula: Look Beyond Opi Junction had not been discovered. When one throws into the scale the magnificent Abuja Complex and the fact that the first and second inaugural lectures were delivered by Nzimiro and the economist Professor Chukuka Okonjo respectively, during his tenure<sup>4</sup>, one feels reluctant to echo the Scope group's assessment of this otherwise eminent mathematician: he did no man any harm neither did he any man any good<sup>5</sup>.

What Professor Umaru Shehu, the next occupant of the seat, found on the ground must have frightened him out of his wits. How else does one explain the new comer's voluntary retirement from public service barely a year into his tenure!

At this point Professor Frank Nwachukwu Ndili, a Cambridge-trained nuclear physicist, mounted the stage. He was determined to make the place better than he found it. Where Umaru Shehu developed cold feet, Ndili took the bull by the horns. He deplored the frustrating bureaucratic machine and regretted the inner smallness exhibited by quite a number of people in a supposedly enlightened community.

For the first time a University Public Complaints Office was opened followed by the appointment of fifteen task forces to tackle long-standing inadequacies. A master plan was produced. It formed the basis for the actual construction of a new Arts Faculty Complex, a new University Bookshop/Bank Complex, a new General Studies Complex, a brand new University Library, the largest in West Africa, and a new Students' Centre Complex. Other works based on



the grand design included a new entrance and internal road network for Enugu campus.

While these projects were in progress, Ndili recovered a huge chunk of university land contiguous with the campus at Nsukka which for over ten years squatters had occupied with impunity and halted any development of the institution in that area. It was on part of the repossessed land that a secondary school for staff children was built in 1983.

Duels between rival student cult-organisations, which subsequently became the order of the day, were unheard of. Students and the Alumni Association applauded the vice-chancellor. Prompt payment of wages and allowances and the provision of stand-by generators further endeared him to the generality of the campus community.

The administration gave academic units financial support towards the hosting of conferences among them the 30<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria. Sabbatical leave and research grants were available on demand. In recognition of the quality of research being conducted at Nsukka the Federal Government accorded the university in 1982 the status of centre of excellence for electronics, for solar energy research and development as well as for cardio thoracic surgery. Also the same year the Government honoured Professor C. Nwokolo and Dr. J. Ojukwu for their outstanding contribution to national development in medicine. A new Veterinary Faculty building was finished the following year and in February 1985, Professor G.E.K. Ofomata delivered the first inaugural lecture from the Department of Geography. His topic was " Soil Erosion in Nigeria: The Views of a Geomorphologist."

Unfortunately no leader has ever succeeded in pleasing everybody at the

same time. Ndili is no exception. Most of those disciplined by the Governing Council for one misconduct or the other became sworn enemies of the management the ever-watchful adversaries lay in ambush poised to strike. They condemned, as another instance of double standard, the refusal of a joint Council/Senate committee of investigation to recommend disciplinary action against a director of the Institute accused of financial and administrative malpractices. The critics probably forgot that, after the University had granted the request of the accuser to be allowed access to numerous documents and files in the place, he still failed to tender incriminating evidence against the director. An indiscreet statement made by the vice-chancellor during a press interview at Abuja was blown out of proportion.

The leaders of the small group of aggrieved persons constituted themselves into a Committee of Concerned Academics. Thereafter they addressed an anonymous memorandum to prominent personalities in the country. The Governing Council, under the chairmanship of Shettima Alt Monguno, countered with a directive to the University administration **to** present for equal circulation its own side of the story highlighting Council's handling of the various cases cited by the anonymous critics. The Ndili Administration of the University of Nigeria and the Committee of Concerned Academics published by the authorities in October 1983 speaks for itself and need not detain us.

Largely because a mere storm in a tea cup had been presented to the nation as a devastating hurricane, the Government set up a Visitation Panel headed by Justice Okara, a High Court Judge, to investigate the matter. The Judge did not hide his sadness and embarrassment at the spectacle of distinguished academics exchanging blows to the neglect of their primary duty: the advancement of

learning. Much to the surprise of those who had been following happenings in the community, Ndili was pronounced guilty. Not only was he removed as vice-chancellor he lost his job as a professor of nuclear physics as well even though his scholarship and competence as a university teacher were not part of the Commission's terms of reference. The chief executive had the last laugh nearly two decades later when the Supreme Court overturned the termination of his appointment.

This verdict was anticipated by reassessments of Ndili's tenure in the Insider Weekly magazine for April 08, 2002. His dismissal, the commentators point out, was due not to any misconduct or failure to deliver but to the fact that the then Minister of Education could not manipulate him. The exit of the nuclear scientist before he lost direction, steam and popularity proved to be a serious mistake from which the institution has not yet recovered. Many of the heart-warming projects he initiated have remained uncompleted, another mocking reminder of yet another lost opportunity.

Ndili's successor, Professor Chimere Ikoku who was gunned down in his Enugu residence by assassins several months ago, sought peace at any price to the extent that he refused to work with Professor Emmanuel Obiechina, his erstwhile colleague in the Scope group and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the time Ndili was sacked. Ikoku explained that the Minister of Education wanted Obiechina dismissed. In an open protest letter dated 8 March 1986 Obiechina argued that no doctor or panel had found him mentally or morally unfit to continue in office. Moreover nothing in the University of Nigeria Law gave the minister the right to demand the removal of a principal officer according to his whims and moods. Although the procedure laid down for relieving such functionaries of their

office had not been followed Obiechina stepped down in the larger interest of harmony and orderly development. Ikoku's frequent absences from campus had the effect of leaving the day-to-day running of the place virtually in the hands of a kinsman nicknamed "*VC ana afuanya*", that is, "the VC on the spot".

Peace proved elusive. Students calling themselves "Vigilantes", a new phenomenon, emerged. Their violent activities were not directed against the administration or the Government but against fellow students they thought were planning trouble. By turning a blind eye to the excesses of the "Vigilantes" the administration strengthened the impression that the thugs were its creatures.

Tributes paid Ikoku by relatives, colleagues and friends emphasise his peaceful and unassuming disposition as well as the fact that he was the first chief executive of the university to serve out two terms<sup>6</sup>. The orations contain little **or** nothing suggestive of measurable progress during his record-breaking eight-year stint. One of his friends tried to justify the conspicuous absence of physical development on the questionable assumption that rapid physical reconstruction is incompatible with the long-term interests of an institution battered in a savage civil war. Does a desperate disease no longer demand a desperate cure? If the gigantic University Assembly Hall, the only major project Ikoku started, was abandoned, it was because of grave structural defects. He redeemed the situation, even if partially, by furnishing the Arts Faculty Complex and the School of General Studies whose construction began in the Ndili era. It was during Dcoku's vice-chancellorship that the University Teaching Hospital achieved the first successful delivery of quintuplets in Nigeria by caesarean section. This was followed by the first successful separation of Siamese twins by indigenous Nigerians in Nigeria.

The second successful separation of Siamese twins at the Hospital occurred

in 1993 barely a year into the tenure of Professor O. K. Udeala, an accomplished pharmacist and winner of the 1990 National Science and Technology First Prize in Medical Devices. The new administration was soon overwhelmed by a series of crises. Allegations of mismanagement of University funds, unauthorised foreign trips and illegal temporary appointments of senior and junior staff were levelled against him. There emerged a three-pronged confrontation. The vice-chancellor quarrelled with Mr. U. Umeh, the Registrar, over Government directives on retirement. Mr. Umeh sought legal advice and redress. ASUU-UNN's attempted mediation met with rebuff from the chief executive. So sour were the relations between him and the organisation that his supporters broke away and formed a shortlived parallel local academic staff union. Udeala's disagreement with the registrar also polarised the senior administrative staff. Even more embarrassing was the vice-chancellor's dispute with the Governing Council on the question of style of administration. At the request of a group of non-academic staff, the court issued an injunction restraining the University and the Administration from implementing circulars from the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission. Matters were complicated when the vice-chancellor proceeded to report the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council as well as the Governing Council itself to the Federal Minister of Education and the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission. In view of the gravity of Council's counter-charges against the complainant, the Federal authorities set up an Administrative Audit Panel headed by Brigadier-General Mamman Bagudu to investigate the crisis. On the basis of an Interim Report the Government suspended the Governing Council and ordered the vice-chancellor to proceed on compulsory leave.

Professor Umaru D. Gomwalk, a chemistry graduate of UCI and first vice-chancellor of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, was appointed Sole-Administrator and Chief Executive in September 1995. His mandate was to implement the Report of the Administrative Audit Panel set up during Udeala's tenure. To facilitate the implementation of the Report, the powers of Council and vice-chancellor were vested in the sole-administrator contrary to the University of Nigeria Law and universal academic practice<sup>17</sup>.

Gomwalk's regime was a mixture of autocracy, philanthropy and academic democracy. The man used Senate, Boards and Statutory Committees. From their deliberations he distilled helpful information and ideas. Unlike Ikoku he resisted the temptation to embark on a new capital-intensive project based on the master blueprint when several such projects were still awaiting completion. Instead he focused attention on existing facilities. And so within two years of taking office he rehabilitated a number of decaying facilities notably The Fela Sowande and Music Buildings, two blocks in the Department of Fine and Applied Art and Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam Stadium. The Princess Alexandra Auditorium, one of the major structures reduced to rubble by the enemy during the civil war, was transformed into an imposing edifice. He went on to rename it the "Princess Alexandra Auditorium for Unity and Peace." Gomwalk intended the reconstructed edifice to be a symbol of a forgotten unpleasant past. With his support Mr. Celestine C. Uwechie, the University Librarian, updated and significantly increased holdings in the library thanks to a World Bank Credit Facility.

The sole-administrator's high sense of duty and concern for the welfare, progress and happiness of colleagues found expression in his progressive promotion policy. The administration devoted much time and energy to the

elimination of widespread frustration among staff through processing and releasing outstanding promotions and innumerable cases of stagnation at various levels<sup>18</sup>. By the middle of 1997 twelve new professorships had been announced. About sixty other professorial cases had been sent out for external assessment and fifty-two additional cases were being processed for dispatch to external assessors. Gomwalk was able to achieve this incredible feat through a humane and sensible interpretation of the notorious Yellow Book, the institution's guidelines for the appointment and promotion of its academic staff. More than one hundred and fifty lecturers were advanced to various other ranks. Countless junior, senior administrative and technical staff many of whom had been stagnating in one post for upwards of fifteen years were elevated. Over one thousand senior teaching staff of various cadres benefited from the administration's forward-looking promotion policy. So too did eight hundred and thirty-seven junior staff. Harmonisation of teachers in the primary school for staff children dispersed dark clouds of sagging morale hanging over the place. The same compassionate disposition ensured the prompt payment of salaries' and allowances. The non-teaching personnel in particular paid back their normous debt through unflinching loyalty to the regime. It was during the Gomwalk era that Mrs. Grace I. Adichie, a sociologist, became the first product of the University to hold the exalted office of Registrar in the *alma mater*.

Like Kodilinye and Ndili, Gomwalk possessed a sense of direction and history and endeavoured from the start to move Nsukka forward of course in the light of his own perceptions. Unfortunately, the impact of Gomwalk's commendable policies was much diminished by the sole-administrator's ill-advised attempt to downgrade ASUU National Strike to a domestic affair<sup>19</sup>. Gomwalk

banned the local branch of ASUU and forbade "until further notice all centrally derived union activities"<sup>20</sup>. He directed the Bursar to delete the names of lecturers on strike from the pay roll and after several warnings eighty-four temporary and unconfirmed academic staff were dismissed. Some of them were Junior Fellows engaged under the university's staff development scheme.

Having recalled students to campus, the sole-administrator used every expedient including the recruitment of part-time teachers to graduate final year students. Two loyal dons were teaching as many as ten courses each regardless of their fields of specialisation. For the first time in the history of the institution Gomwalk appointed one person Dean of Faculty and Head of three academic Departments. These bizarre happenings led ASUU-UNN to the not uncharitable conclusion that the sole-administrator was deliberately compromising the prevailing high academic standards.

At its Congress of May 29 1996 ASUU-UNN resolved to report Gomwalk to security agents for pursuing policies bound to cause a breach of the peace in the University. The next month the union passed a vote of no confidence in the sole-administrator. One of its lavishly documented releases bluntly accused the man of employing Cecil Rhodes' philanthropy plus five per cent principle<sup>21</sup>.

In the midst of the bitter duel between the administration and the academic staff union, unknown persons burnt the Arts Theatre. Electronics Department, one of the nationally recognised centres, of excellence, was **not** spared. Cars, various items of property and the Vice-Chancellor's Lodge were set ablaze. At the time the Vice-chancellor's Lodge was still the official residence of Udeala, then on compulsory leave. The surprise was that the Pro-Chancellor's Lodge, occupied by Gomwalk was not attacked. In view of the running battle with ASUU-UNN, he



accused its leadership of arson and even sedition. The local chairman Dr. George O. S. Amadi of the Faculty of Law and other activists were detained by the Police and unsuccessfully prosecuted.

Yielding to combined pressure from ASUU and Ohaneze Ndigbo, a pan-Igbo cultural organisation, the Government replaced the sole-administrator with Professor Ginigeme Francis Mbanefoh, an economist educated at University of Ibadan. In a maiden address to the university community the new chief executive among other things advised all and sundry to look outwards, beyond Opi Junction, for financial salvation. If we remove our eyes from Opi Junction for a moment and look backwards at the post-Ndili landscape we notice a number of perennial problems. They include declining maintenance culture; unacceptable level of overcrowding and appalling sanitary conditions in halls of residence; growing admiration of the American way of life on the part of our students; the rising tide of cultism and the perpetual in-fighting which saps valuable energy and deprives the institution of the expertise of many a lecturer on the other side. Surely not one of these evils was intended by the Founding Fathers. How many of these evils Mbanefoh will eventually banish from our two campuses is a question that belongs to prophecy not history. The historian is not a soothsayer. He is concerned with what has already happened not with what is yet to happen. Put differently he examines and interprets only accessible evidence; he cannot verify much less explain non-existent facts.

However there is no doubt that, despite the aberrations just noted, the institution has been discharging its triple mandate of research and academic excellence; of training skilled man-power needed for nation-building and of restoring the dignity of the Black Man. From an initial intake of two hundred and

twenty regular students in 1960 the regular student population has risen to roughly twenty seven thousand. Whereas in 1960 there existed only six academic departments we boast today of one hundred and two academic units organised in fourteen faculties. The number of institutes and centres has grown to nine. They include the Institute of African Studies, the Centre for Rural Development and Cooperatives, the National Centre for Atmospheric Sciences and Astronomy as well as the Centre for Biotechnology, which was selected recently as another centre of excellence by the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology. Among other academic units may be mentioned the School of Postgraduate Studies. At the October 2002 Convocation and Founders' Day Celebrations no fewer than three thousand postgraduates were awarded higher degrees. Since its inception forty-three years ago the University has trained more than two hundred thousand women and men. They are to be found in every sphere of national endeavour.

I cannot conclude this inaugural discourse without mentioning what may well be regarded as one of the most glorious pages in the annals of this great centre of learning. I am referring to the recent academic record our own engineering graduate Mr. Osita Onuma set at Imperial College, London University. In the master's degree examination held there in 2000 he obtained 98.85%, the highest score ever recorded in the 124-year history of the College and London University itself. In view of his performance Onuma was invited to deliver the valedictory speech at the Postgraduate Convocation Ceremony of the University of London held on May 6 2002. Not only did President Olusegun Obasanjo send a personal letter of congratulation to Onuma, he also directed the Nigerian High Commissioner in the United Kingdom to attend the ceremony. At about the same time Nsukka took "the first position, among all first generation universities, in a ...

quality assurance exercise in Nigerian universities, undertaken by the National Universities Commission"<sup>22</sup>. Whether Nsukka will continue to shine at home and abroad lies beyond the frontiers of history. As stated above, the historian is concerned with past not future events for he does not know what the future will be. So here ends for now the history of the University of Nigeria<sup>23</sup>. What remains is for me to thank this famous University for its immense contributions to nation building partly through its sustained encouragement of the study of History.

## NOTES

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**A CITATION ON THE 2003 INAUGURAL LECTURER Professor Peter  
Olisanwuche Esedebe, B.A. Hons (Nig.), Ph.D. (London)**  
Professor of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

It gives me great pleasure to stand before you in this renowned citadel of learning to present a citation on the big masquerade of today's intellectual harvest. I consider this a unique opportunity, an appropriate chance for a professor to present himself before an august audience to celebrate the quintessence of intellectual manifestation. The food we are about to eat is hot, burnished with knowledge, adorned with the spices of academic excellence acquired over the years, garnished with the intellectual craftsmanship of master artist.

The journey to the apogee of intellectual acquisition has not been a lightweight activity for our celebrated lecturer. In fact, the journey started almost sixty-five years ago in the serene and idyllic community of Ibusa. Mr. Chairman, fellow academics, lions and lionesses, when on December 8 1938, a baby boy was born in Omeze, Ibusa in Delta State of Nigeria, the well-wishers who assembled in the idyllic tradition of that ancient city, thirsting to welcome the magnificent toddler into this enigmatic world, did not realize that they were looking at a shining star whose light would bring joy and intellectual succor to thousands of people around the world. This star of Ibusa, after obtaining his primary and secondary school certificates with flying colours, migrated to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960 in search of the proverbial Golden Fleece. In this academic institution, which was then blazing the trail in new methods of education, he obtained the Bachelor of Arts of the University with Second Class Honours, Upper Division. Still thirsting for more intellectual exposure, and while his contemporaries basked in the vanity of the possession of a Bachelor's degree; he walked into the deep intellectual waters of the renowned King's College, University of London and walked out with a Doctorate of Philosophy in African History. Mr. Chairman, I am talking of Peter Olisanwuche Esedebe, Professor of History, University of Nigeria, and our inaugural lecturer.

In the course of his academic pursuit, our lecturer did not just pass through the Universities he attended. He allowed the Universities to pass through him, stamping his feet on the sands of time and collecting an avalanche of scholarships and prizes on his enviable road to prominence. For instance, he was the University of Nigeria Scholar (1960-63), he earned the University of Nigeria Eyo Ita Hostel Award in 1963. At the University of London, the story was not different. He was awarded the University of London Commonwealth Scholarship (1964-67). As an academic, Esedebe was the Senior Fulbright Fellow, tenable in Columbia University, New York in 1972; and the 1981 Friedrich Ebert Research

Fellow in Western Germany (an award he failed to utilize because of his commitment to his students).

Professor Esedebe is a man endowed with a great appetite for service. He conceives of service from the viewpoint of Victor Francle as "something that transcends our lives and taps the best energies within us." He renders his services diligently without being forced with the archetypal distractions of human weakness or allows his intellectual acuteness to degenerate into triviality. His middle name is *History*, and he does not hesitate to render service in the development of this subject. Hence, he served as Chief Examiner for History for the West African Examinations Council and the G. C. E. Advanced Level between 1971 and 1978. He was External Examiner for History, Alvan Ikoku College of Education in 1980, Chairman Accreditation Panel for Ondo State University in 1990, and Guest Editor, Special number on Pan-Africanism, *Tarikh*, a publication of the Historical Society of Nigeria in 1980.

Professor Olisanwuche Esedebe has served this country in different capacities. His Administrative experience started with his appointment as Administrative Officer in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ibadan in June 1963. With the establishment of the Mid-Western State, later Bendel and now Delta State, Esedebe was transferred to the Public Service of Mid-Western Nigeria and posted to the Divisional Office, Ubiaja as Assistant Local Government Adviser. He left the Mid-Western Nigeria Public Service in August 1964 when he won the competitive Commonwealth Research Scholarship tenable in the United Kingdom.

With the completion of his Doctorate degree at the University of London in October 1968, Esedebe did not waver from his thirst to impart knowledge at the tertiary level. Hence, decided to change from the file-wielding civil servant to the joy of intellectual dissemination. This thirst to impart knowledge germinated with his appointment as Lecturer in History at the renowned Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, between 1969 and 1975. Because of his commitment to his country, he returned to his alma mater, the University of Nigeria, to assume the position of Senior Lecturer in History in 1975. He was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor in October 1979 and finally attained the Chair of History in October 2001.

At the University of Nigeria, he has served in many capacities some of which are: Co-ordinator of Humanities in the General Studies Department (1981-83); Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts, 1982-85; Head, Department of History, 1984-86; another session as Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts, 1994-95. and another stint as Head, Department of History, 1995-96. He is presently serving another term as Head of the Department of History. In his service to the University of Nigeria, he demonstrates a gigantic degree of commitment, excellence, sincerity and selflessness. He believes, as does David Starr Jordan, that "there is no real

excellence in this world, which can be separate and apart from right living." Hence, he embraced his service in University committees with the ferocity of an Alsatian. Between 1978 and 1990, he served in fourteen committees ranging from membership of Postgraduate studies committee, through chairmanship of the Faculty Task Force on textbooks and Teaching Aids, to chairmanship of Committee of Enquiry on Alleged Examination Malpractices in different departments of the University.

Professor Esedebe does not see History merely as an academic discipline but as a vocation. He is a strong believer in the maxim that "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man." He has attended numerous conferences around the globe, and is a proud author of three books and several chapters in books, an avalanche of book reviews and a multitude of journal articles. He is a dedicated and committed academic who sees excellence through the eyes of the renowned Greek philosopher, Aristotle, thus: We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

The title of his lecture, "Reflections on History, Nation-building and the University of Nigeria" is a product of profound thought and stands as an intellectual monument. It resembles some of the thoughts he has been trying to disseminate throughout his intellectual career. But it is important for us to remember that resemblances are the shadows of differences. In the pursuit of intellectual deconstruction, different people see many similarities and similar differences.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as men of letters become rarer, as intellect recedes into the concepts of cause and effect, let us muse, in the words of the celebrated English poet, T. S. Eliot, that: "We must not cease from exploration; because the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we began; and to recognize the place for the first time".

Mr. Chairman, I now call on this great lion, this Historian par excellence, this dedicated mentor of many academics, the chief priest of today's intellectual harvest, to present the 2003 inaugural lecture.

**Professor P. Emeka Nwabueze**  
Dean, Faculty of Arts